

Bible Study October 7, 2020

Exodus 32 – 33:6

[text Exodus 32:1-14]

Where we last left off, the people were at Mt. Sinai, Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments and the other laws. There are four major collections of law in Torah: the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:19-23:33); the Priestly Laws primarily in Exodus 25-40, much of Leviticus, and the laws in Numbers; the Holiness Codes in Leviticus 17-26; and the Deuteronomic Laws in Deuteronomy 11:31-28:69. These collections are not necessarily consistent with each other, so the interpretation was left to the rabbinic traditions.

Beginning in Exodus 25:1 through 31:18, we read a long discourse by God to Moses. Not all of these laws were written down; rather there were only two tablets that were to be placed in the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:16). Notice in 31:18 the phrase “when God finished speaking with Moses.” As at the time of creation, God’s spoken words become a reality. The spoken word here shapes the transformation from being enslaved people to being the people of God.

Today’s reading seems to pick up where the activity stopped in Exodus 24:18. It focuses on the building of an idol is in stark contrast to the images we saw last week in Chapter 19 as God revealed himself in all of his holiness and “God-ness” to the people. Notice the first phrase of Chapter 32. Not only were the people impatient, but in that impatience they abandoned their lived experience of God’s provision and Moses’ leadership. Are there other times in Scripture that we witness this kind of lapse in the people of God or the followers of Christ? Have you seen this at other times in the Church?

In Exodus 32:1-7, a rather dramatic series of events transpires. Please write this in your own words. What do you think was going on in Aaron’s mind? Verse 1 says that the people gathered around Aaron; a better understanding of this is that the people were gathering *against* Aaron. How might this color what we see unfolding?

Exodus 32:2-3 says that Aaron asked the people to take the gold and wealth that they plundered from Egypt so that the idol could be crafted. What meaning is there in the use of the remnants from Egypt used for the golden calf?

Compare the scenario of Exodus 19 and Exodus 32:4-6. What are the similarities and the differences?

Look at Exodus 32:7-10 and paraphrase this in today's language.

What did Moses see when he came down from the mountain? What was his response to this? What do you make of the fact that the calf was thrown down and burned and ground and scattered and that the tablets of the law were shattered? And what about that curious fact that the remnants of the calf were mixed into the water and the people were forced to drink of it?

There were many interesting images and adjectives used in these verses – burning hot, stiff-necked. How do you understand these today?

What do we learn about leadership from these verses?

One commentator has noted that this section of Scripture speaks of the progression of sin, punishment, intercession and forgiveness. Mark the places where these occur.

What does this say to us today?

Let us pray: *O God we are so apt to stray from what you ask of us. We are so apt to seek after that which does not honor you. Help us to see the idols we have created and help us follow ever more closely to you. Amen.*